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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000504

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SUBJECT: MAYSAN ELECTION: COALITION-BUILDING TIED TO BAGHDAD

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Dan Foote for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a Maysan PRT reporting cable.

Summary

¶2. (C/REL MCFI) Maysan's new 27-member Provincial Council (PC) will be governed by four parties -- Prime Minister Maliki's Da'wa-led State of Law, ISCI's Shahid al-Mihrab, the Sadrists-backed Free Independent Trend, and Dr. Ja'afari's National Reform Trend -- and will be comprised of mostly new members. Top provincial representatives from these parties told the PRT that negotiations were ongoing in Baghdad between the Prime Minister and the other winning entities to decide what shape the governing coalition will take in Maysan, implying that local leaders will not have the final word in deal-brokering. It has been widely reported that Da'wa, which tied with ISCI for eight seats apiece on the new Council, has reached out to the Sadrists, who received seven seats. Outgoing ISCI Deputy Governor Abdul Hussein Abdul Radha said his party would seek alliance with Dr. Ja'afari's party, which was awarded four PC seats. Most provincial party leaders sense that Da'wa will likely assume the governor's chair, but are awaiting the results of wrangling in Baghdad before making an educated assessment on top executive spots. Possible Da'wa gubernatorial candidates include re-elected PC member Muhammed Shi'a and current Director General (DG) of Health Dr. Zamil Shi'a Muhammed al-Gharaybi. In recent meetings, ISCI, Da'wa, and National Reform Trend provincial party leaders pledged their commitment to continuing cooperation and engagement with the PRT and Coalition Forces (CF). End summary.

Da'wa and ISCI Tie for First, Sadrists Drop to Third

¶3. (C/REL MCFI) In the closely contested election in previously Sadrists-controlled Maysan, PM Maliki's State of Law list and ISCI's Shahid al-Mihrab list were both awarded eight seats on the new PC. In certified results, ISCI rebounded from its initial third-place standing in the February 6 preliminary results and edged out the Sadrists/OMS-backed Free Independent Trend (Tayar al-Ahrar) by a mere 18 votes for the second highest vote tally. ISCI officials claimed in meetings with the PRT that the party's rebound was an indicator of its continuing popularity and influence in Maysan. The Sadrists were awarded seven PC seats, followed by former PM Dr. Ja'afari's National Reform Trend list with four seats.

Da'wa: "We Will Be in the Lead"

¶4. (C/REL MCFI) During a recent PRT meeting with outgoing Da'wa Deputy PC Chair Latif Abbud Qasim, he confidently confided that Maysanis chose Da'wa because they wanted politicians who will make a difference. Latif offered little information on the entities with which Da'wa would attempt to form a governing coalition, only saying that Da'wa provincial officials were in close contact with Baghdad, awaiting

guidance from the Prime Minister. Tight-lipped about the direction of reported negotiations with the Sadrists, Latif commented that Da'wa was open to any political entity that subscribed to Da'wa's agenda of development reconstruction, security, and Iraqi unity. (Note: International news outlets have reported that Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and the Prime Minister are close to completing a deal to form coalitions in provinces where Da'wa and the Sadrists won a combined majority of PC seats. End note.) Sadrist contacts have told the PRT that Da'wa aggressively recruited the Sadrists, and that PM Maliki needed a strong partner like the Sadrists, and that PM Maliki needed a strong partner like the Sadrists to stay in power. Conversely, outgoing ISCI Deputy Governor Abdul Hussein Abdul Radha warned that Da'wa would not risk an alliance with the Sadrists because it could mobilize disgruntled tribal leaders.

Breakdown of Top Provincial Positions

¶15. (C/REL MCFI) In discussions regarding potential candidates for leadership roles in the new provincial government - including the PC Chairman, Governor, and Deputy Governor positions - there was a consensus among provincial party leaders that Da'wa would likely fill the governor's chair, while the other top provincial positions would be decided by committees and distributed among the four governing entities.

Possible Da'wa gubernatorial candidates include re-elected PC member Muhammed Shi'a, who received the second largest vote tally on the Da'wa list, PC member Sheikh Ali Muhammed al-Abawdi, and Dr. Zamil Shi'a Muhammed al-Gharaybi, the current Director General (DG) of Health. Opposing provincial party leaders had floated Da'wa Deputy PC Chair Latif Abbud

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Qasim's name as a possible candidate for governor. Latif received the fourth largest total of votes on the Da'wa list.

When asked by Team Leader if he was a candidate for governor, Latif smiled and shook his head no. For ISCI, Deputy Governor Abdul Hussein, who ran away with the most votes among Shahid al-Mihrab candidates, expressed his interest in the governorship to the PRT.

Comment

¶16. (C/REL MCFI) The release of the final election results on February 19 revealed there will be relatively few holdovers from the outgoing provincial government. According to National Reform Trend provincial party leader Khalid Abd al-Wahid Kabyan Sakhi, the top vote-getter for Dr. Ja'afari's party, newly-elected Council members will need extensive training in order to effectively fulfill their responsibilities. Although demoted from its previous position of authority, the Sadrists are reportedly close to accepting an offer from Da'wa to form a majority governing coalition. Such an alliance would be bolstered by the similarities between both entities' stated governing agendas and would further marginalize ISCI in the province. Having met with representatives from three of the four political entities that will make up the new PC, we think it is clear that Baghdad is playing an important role in coalition-building in Maysan, and that all will have to await the outcomes of these closely-guarded negotiations in the next few days. With firm commitments to continuing cooperation with USG elements from our ISCI, Da'wa, Ja'afari, and moderate Sadrist provincial leadership contacts, the PRT will continue to target appropriate training opportunities for the new PC and other provincial leaders to facilitate their capacity to govern. End comment.

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